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Guns and Roses, a Report from "East Timor Peace Mission"

by Karin Kruse, Swedish passenger on Lusitania Expresso

East Timor, supressed by Indonesia since 1975, is an island situated approx. 600 kilometres north of Darwin, Australia. Since the Indonesian "annexation" of the newly independent East Timor (a former Portuguese colony) the Indonesian military has commited genocide on the Maubere-people on East Timor. The anti-communist regime of the Indonese ruler, General Suharto, the huge oil reserves in the Timor sea, the mineral-richness and rainforests of West Papua (another "annexed" province of Indonesia) makes the western countries support the military dictatorship of Suharto, a regime that doesn't care at all about human rights, not even for its own people.

National and international groups has produced hundreds of condemnents of the Indonesian regime, especially about the behaviour in East Timar and West Papua. United Nations, both the General Assembly and the Security Council, the European Parliament, Inter-Parliamentary Union and others has condemned the annexation and declared the East Timorese right to independence. However, the interests of too many countries have led some of these organizations to support the insation in practice. Governments in the western world are satisfied with Suharto: he keeps communism away, he opens the Indonesian market for western products (i.e. 170.000.000 buyers), he welcomes foreign companies that can get cheap labour in Indonesia. And he even gives more: the debt Indonesia has to the western world makes Suharto generous with permissions of oil-drilling, deforestation and mining in the occupied areas for foreign companies.

So, the Jakarta regime gives with one hand...and takes with the other. One hand holds rich resources in its grip, ready to sell them out to the highest bidder. The other hand is bloddy and holding a gun. The blood comes from the 1/2 millon dead in the coup d'état of Suharto in 1965, the 250.000 deaths of East Timorese since 1975, the killed West Papuans since 1963, and all the other persons that has suffered death in this process. And the gun in the bloddy hand is pointed at the East Timorese, the West Papuans, and the Indonesian people themselves.

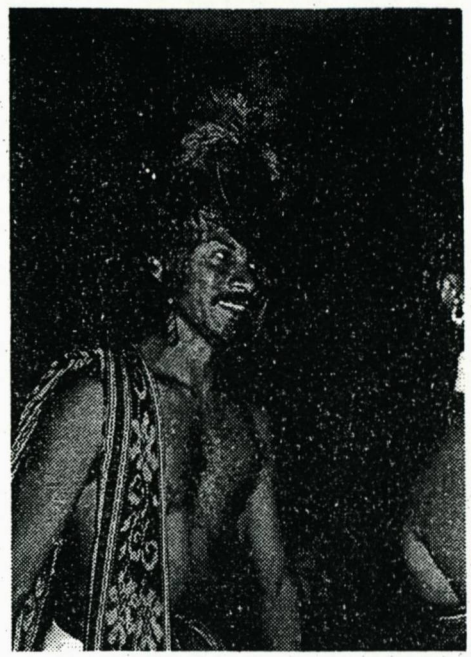
The 12th of November 1991, there was a massacre at the Santa Cruz cemetry in Dili, East Timor. It was "just another massacre", one of many that has taken place in East Timor the last 16 years, just another massacre in the Indonesian genocide of the Maubere-people. But this time something was different: there were foreign witnesses, journalists, that reported about the massacre so that it became known to the world. The journalists were there to cover the visit of a Portuguese parliamentry delegation that never came. The Santa Cruz massacre killed ca. 150 people or more. The average age of the killed were 20 years. The Indonesian states that 50 were killed, but the witnesses claimed that it was three or four times more.

The reaction of the world governments were mild. No real action was taken from any governments. They were mostly satisfied with a reprimand to the ambassador within their own country. Although students and activists all over the world protested outside the Indonesian consulats and ambassies, wrote protest petitions and tried to make a change in the general opinion. This opinion could press the parliaments to take more serious actions against Indonesia, like embargo and withdrawal of aid.

For some students at "Forum Estudiante", a student newspaper situated in Lisbon, Portugal, the massacre of Santa Cruz was the drop that made the glass overflow. They decided to make a spectacular human rights campaign for East Timor, a campaign that should involve participants from as many nations as possible, a campaign so spectacular that it would attract international press so that it could spread information about Indonesian genocide in East Timor. East Timor Peace Mission has started.

East Timor Peace Mission put an general view of the situation:

- *"The mediatic war - The Santa Cruz massacre assumed an unprecedent significance in the recent history of Ti-*



An East-Timorese (living in Darwin), wearing traditional "chief-garment"

mor. The testimony that reached the international community through television images brought up a tragedy that many people ignored or tried to forget. Once more it became clear that a television image is much more powerful than a thousand words."

- "The Indonesian vulnerability - Never in recent history was the international pressure on Indonesia so strongly felt as it is today. The Mission must make the best of this temporary vulnerability. This demands a constant pressure through the creation of political, diplomatic and, above all, mediatic facts."

- "A different world - With the systematic fall of dictatorships and the increasing intolerance towards the Human Rights violations the world can not continue to ignore cases like Timor. Also, with the fall of communism some fears have vanished, making the new world order less favourable to Indonesia."

- "An opportune intervention - The Greenpeace movement, the Live Aid concerts, the Amnesty International, the Chinese and Checkoslovakian student movements, the plight for the Amazonian Indians are examples that show the world is again receptive to new forms of mediatic intervention. To spread any message or win any cause everyone must keep this in mind."

- "National mobilization - Like the international community, Portugal was never so sensitive and receptive to the issue of Timor. Student initiatives have been particulary important to this area."

The strategy of the Eats Timor Peace Mission was therefore to:

- Create an event of great mediatic impact

- Center the intervention on the value of peace and dialogue, for the defense of human rights

- Create a situation that puts an end to inactivity and hastens the course of the events

To fulfill the strategy, the trip was going to be a boat trip from Darwin, Australia, to Dili, the capital of East Timor. On the boat there should be volunteers, mostly students (there were 80 from 21 countries), journalists (about 40 from different newspapers, radio networks and TV networks) and some guests (like the ex-president of Portugal, some Australian MP's, union leaders...). The purpose of the trip was to lay a wreath of flowers at the Santa Cruz cemetry, as a symbolic gesture to make a plea for human rights.

The Mission

There were a lot of security aspects connected with the realisation of the trip.

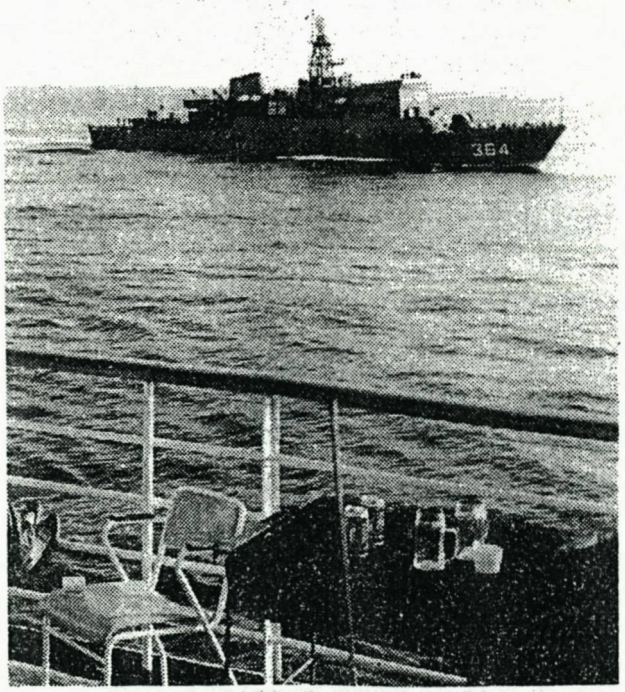
Most of the student participants had gathered in Lisbon. The meaning was that we all should fly with a chartered aeroplane from the Portuguese Airlines. But it was impossible, the technalities did not allow it. First, the Indonesian authorities had already delivered threats to the mission, the action was looked upon as a provocation. To go with a Portuguese plane would have been too dangerous, because the Indonesians interpreted the actions as implemented by the Portuguese parliament. From their point of view, this was a try to to get East Timor back. A Portuguese aeroplane sufferd the risk of getting shot down over Indonesia - or countries under Indonese influence. That risk was not big, but we could just as well be held back in Indonese influenced countries on our way to Darwin when we had to land refuel. Because of this risk, we left 24 hours later, after the miracle of the organizers to get a scheduled flight with Thai Air in the middle of the night.

East-Timor:

Inhabitants: 692,000 (1989)
Areal: 14,864 km^2
Capital: Dili
Invaded by Portugal in: 1566
Invaded by Indonesia in: 1975
Victims of war and starvation since 1975: 200,000
Independence Movement: Nationalist Convergence (a coalition of Uniao Democratica Timorense UDT and FRETILIN, the former Associacao Social Democratica de Timor ASDT)

We made a landing in Bangkok. But first we were forced to land outside Bangkok at a military airport, because there were morning mist in Bangkok. For many participants on the trip this was the first glimpse of the dangers we had exposed us to. Although the landing was needed (there WERE morning mist in Bangkok), many students interpreted the happening as implemented by Indonesia (Thailand is under Indonesian influence), as a sort of demonstration of strength. There was a rsik that the "counterpart" would try to stop us here, so that we never should reach Darwin. Therefore we did not want to get arrested for drug-possesion. That would have dragged the whole mission into the dirt. Because of this, we searched our laguage (which was marked with "East Timor Peace Mission" stickers). No drugs were found.

When we were leaving Bangkok, we were photographed by one policeman and one in civil clothes. We first discovered the policeman, who openly stood on a balcony and made portrait-photos of us all. We gave him some silly faces, and we were not sure if he was taking the photos to use in the reasearch of drug-trafficking or not. The other photographer tried to hide from us. He was situated at the balcony in the other end of the hall. He had a real monster for a camera, and he was making portraits of us secretly. One of us tiptoed away and managed to take some photos of this man. When our man managed to draw the photographer's attention, he tried to hide. But after a while he was there again, taking photos.



One of the war-ships that followed the Lusitania Expresso

In Darwin, we discovered at least three persons working for INTEL, the Indonesian secret service. We also encountered an Australian journalist with strange intentions. And when we were on the boat, the pressroom was mildly sabotaged: someone had disconnected the incoming fax machine, and through the phone companiy ordered the phone disconnected (there were nine phones).

And the whole time there came new threats from Jakarta. We got messages that we should be treated like illegal fishers and be followed out from the Indonesian territorial waters, that we should be arrested and deported, that nine war vessels should meet us at the 12 mile borders of the Indonesian territorial waters, that there had been huge mobilizations of soldiers to East Timor, that were plans to arrange a pro-Indonesian demonstration in Dili that should meet us when we embarked the boat. We also got reports that 38 persons got arrested in Dili because of us. The military-regime of Indonesia saw us, 120 unarmed persons that only wanted to put some flowers at a cemetry, as a threat, a threat that could overthrow the whole Indonesia, the fifth biggest country in the world with 170 millon inhabitants. It is strange, isn't it?

In spite of all the threats, and in spite of that very many were really scared to go, we had reached the point of no return. We had gotten reports that East Timorese risked their security by going down to the beaches to see if our ship had arrived. The newspapers in Dili went up in price to four times the ordinary price. In secret, there were post-cards sold with Lusitania Expresso, our ship. There was also messages from the arrested students in Jakarta which was: "Thank you for coming to East Timor". Even if many of us were critical about the organization, about the questions of fundraising, even if many participants were close to panic of fear, even if many ambassadors tried to talk participants out of the trip, we had to go. We were there for the East Timorese, not for our own satisfaction. And the East Timorese did not care how the action was organized, where the money came from. For them, it was the most important thing that the world should know about their situation, and that there were people ready to risk their security to do this. If we had called it all off, it would have been to act just as rotten as the governments of the world had done so far. The East Timorese has been let down too often, and we were not willing to be counted into the crowd of turned backs.

The boat trip started the ninth of March and ended the twelfth, on the day four months after the Santa Cruz massacre.

The ship left Darwin harbour at late afternoon the 9th, waved away by East Timorese, Australian support groups for East Timor, the press...We waved back until the dusk had hidden land to us.

The next day, in the afternoon when we had passed the 100-miles authority-border to Indonesia, we had the first encounter with the Indonesian military. An aeroplane circled us four times before it turned back in the direc-

tion of East Timor. No contact was made with our captain, who by this time was used to these "quiet encounters". On Lusitania's long journey from Lisbon to Darwin (where the participants waited), the Lusitania had been followed by Indonese war-planes close to the Christmas Islands. The planes were not flying higher than 500 feet, and circled ca. 8 times before they turned back. At dawn, the 11th March, we met three hunter-killers from the Indonesian navy, around 30 miles from East Timor. Two of them followed us on our way to the 12 miles border of Indonesian territorial waters. One of the ships has a big gun and other killing equipment, the other ship has a landing-plate for a helicopter. The helicopter is circling us from above, together with another one with opened doors and a camera-man hanging out in a fatal angle. Still, no contact. The ships are circling us really close. At seven o'clock in the morning, we are 22 miles from Timor, and now we can see the contours of the island, and some buildings. we are wondering if the Mauberes can see us. Later we heard that no one was allowed to go outdoors that day. At around 7.30, the first contact is taken with our captain. The call comes from one of the commanders of the war-ships following us. The commander asks us to turn around , tells us we are not welcome. The captain on our ship tries to negociate, tells the commander that we do not want to cause any harm, that we only want to put some flowers on the cemetry...The answer we get is, that we got two warning shots will go off, both of them loose shells. The third shot will go off is loaded and pointed at the Lusitania. Everyone wanted to on, to turn around at the first loose shell. Some people even wanted to go on until the second shot. But the decision was in the hands of our captain, and with all the responsibility he had on his shoulders, as the trust from all the parents that had children on the boat, the crew, the owner of the ship, our captain did not want to take any risks at all. There had been leaders in the Indonesian parliament that actually wanted to sink our ship, and our captain did not want to provoke an action like that.

When the engines started to turn the ship around, we all gathered in the back of Lusitania. All the flowers and the wreaths we had planned to lay down at Santa Cruz were now thrown in the Timorese sea, with condolences and greetings in 21 different languages. We were happy to notice that carnations and some flowers were floating really well. If we were lucky, these flowers would float to shore in Timor, giving a token to the Mauberes that we had been there, at least, but were forced to go back. These flowers would hopefully fill the East Timorese people with the hope that now more people around the world will know about their situation, and that, after the Mission, it will be easier to form an opinion against Indonesian rule. Probably the Indonesian soldiers were afraid of this, too. Flowers that would float ashore would anly give hope to the East Timorese, and they would resist even stronger than they have done so far. We were asked to stop throwing things into the sea. Because of some delays, the captain did not give us this order directly, so when the request came, nearly all our flowers were floating in the direction of East Timor.

After a couple of minutes, the captain spoke out again. The motors were going to be shot off for an hour, due to overheating in the engines and the refregirators. Although the Indonesians probably understood that the problem wasn't a big one, they gave us the triumph of laying still in the Timor sea for two and a half hours, within sight from East Timor, with company from the killer-hunters and helicopters still circling us. But when the engines had managed to "cool down" we had to go. The military did not allow us to stay another minute. Very sad and depressed we left Timor behind us. We so much would have liked to go to Dili, to meet the East Timorese people on their land. It would have given us so much. Now we went away with just another experience: that we are NO arguments against weapons. The only argument you can use in front of a gun is your own life.

Flowers, that hopefully have reached the beaches of Timor by now.

We were followed by three Indonesian warships. The last one left us at midnight. By then, we were in international water, anyway in Australian authority waters. We were a bit disappointed over that the Indonesians had threatened us with nine warships in their propaganda, but we had only seen three. Well, the disappointment did not last too long; we soon were informed that 14 warships had been waiting for us round Timor.

We returned to Darwin the 12th of March, on the day four months after the Santa Cruz massacre. This date will from now on have double dignity in the struggle for East Timor liberation. The twelfth will become a day of sorrow and triumph at the same time. The 12th of November 1991 was big sorrow, for so many people got killed. Although all deaths feel meaningless, the deaths of all those who died in Santa Cruz were reported on to the rest of the world. The victims of Santa Cruz generated the East Timor Peace Mission to make a try of agenda-setting for the whole world for East Timor. In this we succeeded quite well. Now, the 12th will be remembered because of the Mission too, that there are people out there in the world that care for the Mauberes, that there are people that are willing to fight for their rights through their own governments. The East Timorese people are no longer voiceless (well, they have never been, but now there are more people that help them to scream in countries that did not care about them for all before).

Back in Darwin, we were sent away home too quick. We did not get time to round up our workshops at all. But one thing is for sure: the Mission does not end here. Next year there will probably be another mission. This time the initiative will be Australia. And the protests will not end.

In the beginning of June, IGGI will have a meeting in Den Haag, Netherlands. The IGGI is an international fora for deliviry of aid to Indonesia. If your country is member, find out who is the person that will go to the meeting. Ask him kindly to either stop the aid to Indonesia, or at least give the aid away with restrictions that human rights should be respected in whole Indonesia. There will be big protest meetings in Den Haag, and a lot of people are going to these protest. You are welcome too!

In August, the United Nations will once again have a vote about a resolution against Indonesia and the East Timor question. The last vote was in the beginning of March, and was voted down, again. Can you reach your representant in this question, and ask him kindly to vote in favour for a resolution? Thank you!

World demonstrations 12th November and 7th December (Invasionday).
Go to the Indonesian embassy or consult in your country. If you are lucky, there will be other people there protesting. You are welcome to join the gang!

Do you need more information? Here are some addresses:

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